

[0060] Versions of the present invention have application in conventional endoscopic and open surgical instrumentation as well as application in robotic-assisted surgery.

[0061] Having shown and described various embodiments of the present invention, further adaptations of the methods and systems described herein may be accomplished by appropriate modifications by one of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the scope of the present invention. Several of such potential modifications have been mentioned, and others will be apparent to those skilled in the art. For instance, the examples, embodiments, geometrics, materials, dimensions, ratios, steps, and the like discussed above are illustrative and are not required. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention should be considered in terms of the following claims and is understood not to be limited to the details of structure and operation shown and described in the specification and drawings.

I/We claim:

1. An apparatus, comprising:

- (a) a strap, wherein the strap is sized and configured to wrap along a first plane to encompass an anatomical feature; and
- (b) an inflatable bladder secured to the strap, wherein the inflatable bladder is shaped such that the inflatable bladder has a cross-sectional profile that is asymmetric about the first plane.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the inflatable bladder includes an upper region generally above the first plane and a lower region generally below the first plane, wherein the lower region has a cross-sectional profile that is wider than the cross-sectional profile of the upper region.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the inflatable bladder includes an inclined surface extending from the upper region to the lower region, providing the inflatable bladder with a tapered cross-sectional profile.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the inflatable bladder comprises a wall defining an open space configured to receive a fluid, wherein the wall has a thickness that is generally uniform about the perimeter of the bladder.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the inflatable bladder comprises a wall defining an open space configured to receive a fluid, wherein the wall has a thickness that varies about the perimeter of the bladder.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the wall includes corner regions, wherein the thickness of the wall is greater at one or more of the corner regions than the thickness of the wall at other regions of the wall.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the bladder includes an expansion section, wherein the expansion section is configured to allow the bladder to transition from a first state in which the bladder has a substantially flat cross-sectional configuration to a second state in which the bladder has a substantially tapered cross-sectional configuration.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the expansion section comprises one or more structures selected from the group consisting of folds, pleats, and gussets.

9. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the inflatable bladder comprises a wall defining an open space configured to receive a fluid, wherein the expansion section is formed at least in part by the wall.

10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the inflatable bladder comprises a wall defining an open space configured to receive a fluid, wherein the wall includes an inner region configured to engage the anatomical feature.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the inner region of the wall is thicker than one or more other regions of the wall.

12. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the inner region of the wall is contoured with at least one curve.

13. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the bladder further comprises an upper portion generally above the first plane and a lower portion generally below the first plane, wherein the upper portion of the bladder has a cross-sectional profile that is narrower than the cross-sectional profile of the lower portion of the bladder.

14. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the bladder further comprises an upper portion generally above the first plane and a lower portion generally below the first plane, wherein the upper portion of the bladder has a cross-sectional profile that is wider than the cross-sectional profile of the lower portion of the bladder.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the bladder has a height, wherein the upper portion and lower portion together extend along the height, wherein the bladder is configured such that the cross-sectional profile width will change along the height of the bladder as a bolus passes through the anatomical feature.

16. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the inner region of the wall defines a plurality of peaks and valleys.

17. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the strap is sized and configured to wrap along a first plane to encompass an esophagus or an upper portion of a stomach, wherein the bladder is configured to create a variably restrictive stoma passageway in the esophagus or upper portion of the stomach.

18. An apparatus, comprising:

- (a) a strap, wherein the strap is sized and configured to wrap along a first plane to encompass an anatomical feature, wherein the strap is shaped such that the strap has a cross-sectional profile that is asymmetric about the first plane; and
- (b) an inflatable bladder secured to the strap.

19. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein the strap has a height and includes a plurality of annular ribs, wherein the annular ribs are spaced along the height of the strap, wherein the annular ribs are progressively wider along the height of the strap to provide the strap with a tapered cross-sectional profile.

20. An apparatus, comprising:

- (a) a strap, wherein the strap is sized and configured to wrap around an anatomical feature; and
- (b) an inflatable bladder secured to the strap, wherein the inflatable bladder comprises a wall defining an open space configured to receive a fluid, wherein the wall defines a perimeter and has a thickness, wherein the thickness of the wall varies along the perimeter.

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